

Paul Defends His Apostleship, Part 2

Scripture: Galatians 1:10–24

Code: 48-6

We are looking at the book of Galatians. So take your Bible, if you will, and open it up to this letter, the letter to the churches of Galatia. Galatia was a region on the Mediterranean that would be corresponding to modern-day Turkey. It was a Gentile region where the apostle Paul had planted churches. He went there on all three of his missionary journeys. He had many relationships there. He had seen many people come to faith in Christ, and he had also seen false teachers coming in behind him after he left and trying to disrupt the church and establish themselves as the true teachers so they could propagate a false gospel.

This is how it is in the kingdom. There is the truth and there is the ever-ongoing pursuit of error that tries to denounce and discredit and deny the truth. It has always been a battle, because Satan continues to wage war against God. And Satan is the author of lies and deceit, and he infiltrates the church to this very day to confuse and lead people astray. He operates primarily in the realm of religion, false religions, and false forms of Christianity. This started very early when the apostles were out preaching the gospel. The false teachers were dogging their steps to try to undo what the Lord was doing and lead people astray. Satan, of course, is the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world, the one who leads the kingdom of darkness; and he has been very successful.

The apostle Paul wrote this letter. He wrote this letter to the churches in the region of Galatia to make clear to them that they had to hold to the true gospel. I've been saying to you that what Satan always wants to do is confuse people about the way of salvation. People who are confused about the way of salvation cannot avoid hell. It's always Satan's attempt to twist the gospel, sometimes overtly and sometimes very subtly. This letter is written by the apostle Paul, sometimes called Saul. Saul was his actual Hebrew name, Paul his Gentile Roman name. He is known by both according to Acts 13:9.

The Lord inspired him to write this letter. What we have in this letter then is the word of God coming down from heaven. Paul is the one who writes it, Paul is the one who uses his vocabulary and speaks out of his own experience; but every word is from God. And that is true of every book in the Bible, as you know.

Paul wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament, and this is the first of them chronologically. And his first and important letter is to establish the gospel of grace and faith; that's critical. Our Lord has taught us the gospel of grace, the gospel of love in His life in ministry. The apostles preached the gospel of grace, the gospel of love and forgiveness in the book of Acts. We followed their preaching. Then comes the apostle Paul who writes all these letters explicating, explaining the essence of the glorious gospel of grace.

Some people think that Paul had a different gospel than the other apostles, and that maybe the other apostles even had a different gospel than Jesus did. So we really need to go back in our thinking to what Jesus taught: "What is the way of salvation? Is it by grace alone through faith, or are there

some necessary works? Is there some necessary moral behavior or religious behavior to qualify you to receive salvation? Or can you come as a bare naked sinner, having accomplished absolutely nothing that gains favor with God and be saved in that stark kind of desperate condition?"

Well, in fact, that is the gospel of grace, and our Lord did proclaim it. There are two passages in the gospel of Luke that come immediately to mind, I'll just remind you of them. The first is in Luke 15, and it's the story of what we call the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son depicts the worst imaginable sinner who has turned his back on his father and taken his inheritance and wasted it on prostitutes and wild living in a foreign country. When he runs out of resources he finds himself in the midst of a famine. He ends up trying to eat the food the pigs eat; but he can't even eat that, because his digestive system won't process it. So he is completely in despair. He is in the middle of a famine. He has no food, he has no future, he has no resources left. He decides to go home to his father, to go back to the father.

He comes back, and the father sees him as he approaches the village in the desperate condition that he is in. The father who represents the Lord Jesus Christ in the parable sees him from afar, runs to him, throws his arms around him, kisses him all over the head, embraces him as his son; puts a robe on him, the robe of entitlement in the family; puts a ring on him, the ring of authority in the family; puts sandals on him. Sandals were worn by sons; slaves were barefoot. Therefore we see in the story that God in Christ has fully embraced the sinner before the sinner can do anything to make things right. That's the gospel of grace. A penitent sinner coming to the Father to Christ will receive such grace.

Our Lord told another story in Luke 18 about two men in the temple who were praying: one was a Pharisee, saying, "I thank You that I'm not like other men, this publican over here, this open sinner. But I tithe, I pray, I fast, I do all these righteous things." He was celebrating his morality and his religiosity before God in his supposed prayer.

The other man, the open sinner wouldn't look up to heaven, he kept his eyes downward, and he was pounding on his chest in signs of grief, and all he could utter out of his mouth was, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said, "That man went home justified rather than the other." There's our Lord saying, "Salvation comes to the penitent as a gift of grace, without merit, without works.

I read you earlier where Paul declares that when he says, "God is the justifier of sinners." That's salvation. It is a gift that is not earned, it is received. It is a gift of grace undeserved, received by a simple act of faith in which the sinner says, "I believe in Jesus; save me." That's the gift that God gives; the sinner receives.

Paul's explanation in Romans 3 and 4. It's by faith, by faith, by faith; not works, not works, not works, over and over in that passage. He sums it up in a concise way in Ephesians 2:8 and 9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, not of works. It is a gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." It's a gift of God. It's an undeserved gift. It's a gift of grace. That is the good news of salvation, and as we read in Romans 3, we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are hopeless in devising our own salvation; and that God's glorious, loving grace, all we have to do is reach out to receive by believing in His Son. That's the gospel.

Now that was a dramatic change from what Jews believed in the time of our Lord and the time of

Paul. And, essentially, what the Jews believed was that God is gracious, and God will forgive; but you must contribute, you must participate. There are some works that you must do. They would have said, "You need to be circumcised, you need to adhere to the Mosaic traditions, you need to be a righteous person, and if you qualify, God will take you the rest of the way."

And, by the way, that is what every religion in the world propagates in one way or another, and that's what every false form of Christianity propagates as well. It is not acceptable to Satan, and therefore it is not part of false religion to have a salvation by grace alone through faith alone. In Paul's day the Jews hated Christianity. They hated it because they hated the idea that a crucified Jew crucified by the Romans was designated as their Messiah; one who not only didn't conquer Rome and their enemies, but was killed by Rome. They hated Christianity not only because of Christ being touted as their Messiah, but they hated Christianity because it stripped out all their self-righteous effort and works, which they had accumulated, and by which they had adorned themselves with a certain kind of spiritual pride. When Jesus came along and preached the gospel of grace through faith, He stripped them of all their self-righteousness. They hated Him for that.

Legalistic Judaism, however, would not settle for the development of the church and the growth of the gospel, they began to early fight against it. Not only did they fight against it outside the church, but they began to fight against it inside the church. In an amazing set of circumstances, Satan began to pull into the church Jewish "converts" who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, who believed that He died and rose again, who believed that He was the Savior, and to acknowledge their belief in all of that. But they also declared that that is not enough for salvation. You must adhere to the Old Testament covenantal Mosaic and traditional law, which means you must be circumcised, and you must conform to the traditions. The only way Gentiles could come to salvation was to come through Judaism, through circumcision, and through the traditions of Judaism.

As the apostles scattered, and particularly the apostle Paul, into all these Gentile cities, he treats the simple, pure gospel of grace and faith without circumcision, without the law, without tradition; and they followed him. Everywhere he went they dogged his steps, and they came into these congregations declaring themselves to be believers in Jesus Christ who were there to say, "Paul has invented this message; this is not the true gospel. Paul may have gotten it from some of the apostles in Jerusalem who also had invented this message. And you must know that you can't be saved unless you're circumcised, unless you follow old covenant ancestral tradition." They went everywhere doing this.

In the fifteenth chapter of Acts, we have a statement that sums it up. Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." That says it. "Unless you're circumcised, you cannot be saved."

Why would they concoct this kind of message? They concocted this kind of message because they were emissaries of Satan, first of all. But they concocted it in their own minds, because it would save them from being persecuted so greatly by their Jewish family and friends. So they came up with a hybrid gospel, a gospel that affirmed grace and affirmed faith, and then added works. And they followed the apostle Paul into all the churches that he founded; and as soon as he was gone, they began to propagate these things, having gained entrance because of their declared faith in Christ. They actually went so far as to claim they were from Jerusalem and that they had some connection with the mother church, the Jerusalem church.

You say, “Well, I mean as long as you believe in Christ, and as long as you understand there’s grace, what harm is there in adding a little bit of works to it? Is that harmful?” Paul answers that in the very beginning of this book, chapter 1, verse 8. He says, “If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” That’s *anathema*. He’s to be damned, devoted to destruction.

Says it again: “As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” He pronounces a curse, a double curse on anyone who tampers with the gospel. He was profoundly concerned about what had happened among the Galatian churches. Go back to verse 6: “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

Chapter 3, he says to them in verse 1, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? You already have received the Spirit. You have the Spirit at work in your life; you know that. Were there any works in that? Why now are you turning to works?”

In chapter 4 he addresses it again in verse 9: “Now that you have come to know God,” – or rather be known by God – “how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”

He addresses it again: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free;” – freedom from those old rituals – “therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Don’t go back. “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he’s under obligation to keep the whole Law. If you’re going to come by way of the Law, if you’re going to say Law is the way of salvation, then you have to keep the whole Law perfectly. That’s not possible. We through the Spirit,” – he says in verse 5 – “have come by faith.”

In verse 4, he says, “If you go the route of law, you have been severed from Christ. You who are seeking to be justified by law, you have fallen from grace.” This is a very serious issue. You can talk about grace, you can talk about faith; but if you add law to the gospel of salvation, you have nullified the gospel, you have severed yourself from Christ, and you have come under a divine curse.

Now why is legalism so horrendous? Why is legalism so unacceptable to God? First of all because He is perfectly holy, and therefore what He requires is perfect righteousness, and you can’t do it; and anything less than that is to fall short of His glory. So, first of all, the law is not a means of salvation, because no one can keep it.

But there’s more to it than that. Legalism is not in its worst definition a misunderstanding of the law; it is that. The law is not given to us to save us, it’s given to us to condemn us so we can run to God to be saved by grace through faith. But the worst of this legalism is not its misconception of the law. The worst aspect of legalism is that it is first and foremost a lie about God. It is a lie about God. It is

blasphemy of God. It is slander against God. It is not just a wrong view of law, it is a wrong view of God. The devastating reality of legalism is that it strips God of His glory. It is an assault on God, it is an attack on God, and that is the worst possible thing that any sinner could ever do.

You say, "What do you mean?" It fails to acknowledge that God is loving and gracious to the extent that He is. When you say, "God will give you grace. God loves you. He'll grant you grace and mercy and forgiveness. But you must do this," you have just diminished the pure grace of God.

This is an attack on His character. It fails to acknowledge that His grace is greater than all our sins, that His love is beyond our wretchedness. This is to say God loves less than He does, is less merciful than He is, is less gracious than He is; and that is slander against God. Legalists think they are paying homage to God by keeping law as some means of righteousness, when in fact they are slandering God by failing to recognize the greatness, the infinite nature of His love and grace.

Reminds me of the slave in Luke 19:21. When the master came back and asked the slave what he had done with what he had given him to invest, you remember the slave's answer was, "I was afraid of you. I was afraid of you, because you're an exacting man." That's the comment of a legalist who doesn't trust love, who doesn't trust mercy, who doesn't trust grace. "I was afraid of you. I was so afraid of you, I felt that you might do what I wouldn't even expect. You might actually lay down something that I didn't anticipate you would lay down. You might even begin to reap something that you didn't sow. In other words, you invade people's lives in unexpected ways. I don't trust you. You're a hard person."

By the way, that is the essence of Roman Catholicism. That's the Roman Catholic definition of God. "So you'd better do some works. And don't go directly God, He's hard. Jesus is tough as well, so go to Mary." That is slander against God, against His nature as all-loving and all-gracious and all-merciful. That is why God hates legalism, because it fails to acknowledge the greatness of His grace. Getting the gospel right is not only essential for the sake of the sinner being saved, but it is essential for the essence of true worship of God. So Paul, in Galatians – that was a long introduction. Paul, in Galatians, is defending the gospel.

Now to defend the gospel he has to also defend himself, because there is no New Testament yet, and he's the one preaching the true gospel. And the false teachers are coming with the false gospel. Paul has to defend the gospel, which he does in chapters 3 and 4; but to do that, he has to defend his apostleship. They have to believe him. They have to believe he actually is a true apostle, has come from God with a divine message granted to him. So that's what he does in chapters 1 and 2.

Now let's go back to chapter 1 and be reminded that he takes great pains to defend his apostleship. Everything is about his authority, his credentials. He opens the letter, first verse of chapter 1: "Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)." Why does he start that way? Because that identified him as an apostle. An apostle was a man who had been ordained by God, called personally by Christ, and seen the risen Christ. All twelve of the apostles could say that. Judas, of course, is disqualified, chapter 1 of Acts; Matthias takes his place.

The early church knew the apostles, they knew who they were. They had been with Christ for three years. They had walked with Christ and they had received divine revelation from His lips. None of

them – do you remember this? – none of them came out of the rabbinical training system in Israel. None of them were rabbis, none of them were Pharisees, none of them were Sadducees, none of them were teachers. They were all working men, so that what they knew didn't come from some Judaistic source. What they knew came directly from the lips of Jesus in the three years of ministry to them.

When Paul comes along and says, "I'm an apostle," they're going to ask the question, "Well, why should we believe you? We know who they were, and they were with Jesus. And when they were preaching in the early years of the church, you were persecuting the people who believed what they were preaching. How is it that we're to accept you as an apostle?"

And what they came up with was, "Well, you've decided to be a man-pleaser. You're floating around the Gentile world and you're preaching an inadequate gospel that doesn't include circumcision and Mosaic law. You're preaching a distorted gospel, and you've invented it on your own, or you've borrowed it from the apostles," who also had removed the Jewish law from the gospel, at least in the minds of the Judaizers.

So the people in the churches are saying, "Do we really believe Paul? Can we believe him?" Judaizers calling his authority into question.

Now they already had heard the gospel, believed the gospel, received the Holy Spirit, were living transformed lives. But the false teachers had caused them to listen, and then to lean in the direction of a false gospel. Paul is deeply, deeply concerned.

So he says in verse 11, "I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

"I did not receive this gospel from man." Why does he say that? Because that is an apostolic qualification. He says he was an apostle by the will of God and through Jesus Christ – chapter 1, verse 1 – and now he says he received his gospel through a revelation from Jesus Christ. That's exactly the same way the twelve received it from Jesus Christ. He calls it the gospel of God. He calls it the gospel of Christ. And he even calls it "my gospel," because it was personally given to him. He is then going to defend the fact that he has received his gospel from the Lord Himself. He has divine authority.

First, he reaches back to look at his pre-conversion days. Look at verses 13 to 14, just a brief review. "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

He says, "Look, go back to my pre-conversion days. Go back and realize two things: I was a legalist. I was steeped in legalism as deeply as someone could possibly go. I was more zealous than everybody else around me, a Pharisee of the Pharisees," and they were the extremist of the extreme. "I was deep into Judaism. I was so passionate about Judaism that I was a persecutor of Christians because I saw them as blasphemers of God. I was a legalist. I was a legalist beyond other legalists. I was the most extreme legalist possible, and I was a persecutor. I was a fanatic. No

people, no men could have shown up in my life and said, 'Hey, let me show you another possible approach to religion.' That wasn't going to work. I was so deep and so steeped that no men could change what I believed. I was so zealous for it, that I even sought to murder the people who gave me an alternative message."

You say, "Well, maybe he didn't know the gospel." He knew the gospel. He knew the gospel, because that's why he arrested Christians. He knew it and he hated it. That's why he sought to kill them; he knew and hated what they preached.

I just remind you, by the way, that we shouldn't be surprised by that. If you take Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament shows His handiwork." For you, you look up and you say, "There is a God, and God has made this. All of this reveals God." To an atheist, he looks up and says, "There is no God."

"But wait a minute; the heavens declare the glory of God." But not for a blind, dead heart. Somebody might conclude that there had to be a Creator, there had to be a God. But it's just as likely and more popular today to be an atheist and reject the very loud voice of creation that speaks of a Creator.

The same is true with the gospel. You hear the gospel, and it's winsome and believable, and you embrace it. But the world hears the gospel, and they resent it, and they hate it, and they push it back. You can take Albert Einstein who studies the intricacies of the universe and concludes he rejects the God of the Bible. You can take Stephen Hawking who studies the intricacies of the universe in all of its mathematical equations and ends up an atheist, hostile. You can take a person like Paul, and he can know what the message of the gospel is, and it'll cause him to want to kill the people that are propagating it. So when you look at his pre-conversion, you can't possibly imagine that somewhere along the line some people came up to him and gave him a new message and he just flipped and started preaching; it's not going to happen.

No. Look at his conversion. Here's the only explanation, verse 15: "But when God," – this is where it has to start, right? – "but when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb – when I was conceived in my mother's womb, God had set me apart to belong to Him. When God was pleased," – end of the verse – "when God was pleased and called me through His grace, that's when the change came. It wasn't men, only God could revolutionize me that way. He called me through His grace, and was pleased to reveal His Son to me so that I might preach Him among the nations."

"Look at my conversion. I'm not a second-class apostle. I'm not a second-hand convert. I didn't hear the gospel from an apostle. I didn't hear the gospel from another person. I didn't hear the gospel from a group of Christians in Damascus. God, the God who chose me, called me, and He called me on the Damascus Road by His Son saying, 'Saul, Saul.' He called me – the direct act of God. When it pleased Him, He called me." Effectual calling, a saving calling.

And immediately, what happened? Acts 26:19, Paul says, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." In a flash, he dropped his Judaism, counted it but manure, and embraced the gospel. There's no human explanation for that. "I didn't sit down with a group of Erudite Christians, it was a sovereign work of God on a miraculous level. And then at that moment" – so important – "he revealed His Son to me."

How did the original twelve learn about the gospel? From the lips of Jesus. That's exactly how Paul did as well. "He removed the scales from my eyes," – as Paul says in Acts – "He removed the scales as well from my heart, and I saw His Son," – I love this statement – "that He revealed His Son to me." Not Jesus, but he's already come to the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, one in nature of God, the deity of Jesus. Paul went from hating Jesus to believing He was the Son of God in a flash.

Transforming grace, illuminating grace. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the divine plan and purpose of God. Christ is the one who speaks to him. He gives a word of testimony about this in the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts. I think it's so powerful, I want to read it. He's rehearsing what happened on the Damascus Road.

"Jesus says to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads.' – those were sticks that were sharpened on the end to move the animals along when they were herding them – 'It's hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up, stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness, not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'"

On the Damascus Road he's blind, he's got a mouthful of dirt. He's told to stand up. He stands up, and he is given the gospel of the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ; and it came directly from the mouth of Jesus. That's divine revelation. That was his calling. He was called like all the other apostles, directly by Jesus. He was given the message like all the other apostles, directly by Jesus.

Look at his pre-conversion. There's no human explanation for his change. Look at the moment of his conversion. How could you possibly believe anything else than that God invaded his life, when in a moment the transformation was so complete.

One more step. What happened after his conversion? Maybe he learned this message after his conversion. So he says in verse 16, "I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood." That's really the heart of his testimony right there. "I didn't go to anybody to get this gospel. I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. A few days in Damascus; I didn't sit at the feet of Ananias. I didn't get together with a group of Christian believers there to have them explain things to me. I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. I didn't enter into any conversations with people in Damascus. Further," – verse 17 – "nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I did not go to Jerusalem. What I'm saying, the gospel I'm preaching, the gospel of grace without circumcision and without law, is not something that I got from the apostles in Jerusalem; this came directly to me from God. Therefore it is the true message. I didn't go to Jerusalem."

"Where'd you go?" Verse 17, "I went away to Arabia." "Arabia?" Nabataean Arabia it was called. If you go north from Israel into the area around Lebanon and go east, you come to Damascus. And if you go from Damascus east and south all the way to the bottom of the Sinai peninsula, that's all Nabataean Arabia.

Paul went into that wilderness somewhere probably near Damascus. He went there alone. He went

there. He didn't go to the apostles saying, "I need instruction." He didn't even stay with the Christians in Damascus saying he needed instruction.

Truthfully, he didn't have much of a choice, because in chapter 9 of the book of Acts, as soon as he was converted – this is so amazing – as soon as he was converted, "Several days," – Acts 9:19 – "for several days immediately after his conversion, he was with the disciples who were at Damascus just a few days, recovering from three days of blindness, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"

What is going on? He started going into the Jewish Synagogues proclaiming Jesus is the Son of God. "And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?'" The Jews in the synagogues knew he was a persecutor of Christians, and said, "What is happening here?"

"Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus." Not only was he preaching Christ, he was proving that Jesus is the Messiah. Where is this coming from? Where is he getting this ability to handle the Old Testament and to handle the truth about Jesus? How does he know about the life of Jesus? How does he know about the proof? How does he know the connections to the Old Testament? He is being taught by the risen Lord Himself.

"When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him. Their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death. He couldn't leave. He couldn't get out; they would have arrested him and killed him. But his disciples took him by night, let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket, lowering him in a basket." That's how he got out. And where did he go? He went to Arabia. He went to Arabia.

What did he do in Arabia? He sat at the feet of Jesus. Follow the text. He says this: "I went to Arabia and returned once more to Damascus. Started in Damascus preaching, 'Jesus is the Son of God,' and proving it. Was let out of the city in a basket, went into Arabia." And the time that he was in Arabia, what do you think he was doing? He was learning, and he was preaching wherever he could find people.

Verse 18 says, "Then three years later I went to Jerusalem. Started in Damascus, went to Arabia, returned to Damascus at the end of the three years, and then went to Jerusalem." Three years in Arabia between the two visits at Damascus. Why three years?

How many years had the twelve been with Jesus? Three years. This is his private, personal tutorial with Jesus for his own three years. Three years. And you wonder why the richness of his theology takes thirteen books in the New Testament to write out; because he spent so much time receiving divine revelation, which was given back to him in the writing of these books.

"Only after that, after three years, I went to Jerusalem," because they're saying, "You've bought into this message of the apostles who are also preaching this message of grace without circumcision and law. You got it from them, didn't you." And he says, "No, I didn't. I preached it from the get-go. I spent three years in the wilderness. Only then did I even go to Jerusalem. And, oh, by the way, I went there

to become acquainted with Cephas. I went to meet Peter. I wanted to meet Peter.” He was the great preacher in the early church. You see his sermons in Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8. “I wanted to meet Peter, the leader of the apostles.” That’s understandable.

That wasn’t easy however. Listen to what it says back in the ninth chapter when it describes that trip. It says, “When he came to Jerusalem,” – verse 26 – “he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews;” – the Jews from around the Mediterranean – “but they were attempting to put him to death.” They’re going to kill him now in Jerusalem. “When the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea” – which is a port on the Mediterranean – “and they sent him off to Tarsus,” – where his home was.

Now back to Galatians. “I went to Jerusalem. I only went there to see Peter. I couldn’t get to the apostles, they were afraid of me. Finally, Barnabas takes me to meet them. I’m boldly preaching Christ in the city of Jerusalem.” Again, it doesn’t ever say, “He was learning; he sat at the feet of.” It just says as soon as he got there, he started preaching, and he preached so powerfully and boldly they tried to kill him. And the apostles and disciples grabbed him, rushed him to Caesarea, put him on a boat back to his home city. That’s where the story picks up in Galatians 1:21.

“Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” Syria and Cilicia is the region where Tarsus was. So it’s just saying what the book of Acts says. “I was there fifteen days, and I left to go to Syria and Cilicia.”

Now let’s go back to verse 18 for a moment. “I wanted to get acquainted with Peter.” The assumption is that he met him and spent those couple of weeks with him. And then this one other comment, verse 19: “I didn’t see any other of the apostles.” Why? Most likely they were scattered preaching. But he did see James, the Lord’s brother, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church.

So what is he trying to tell us? “I wasn’t taught by the apostles. I wasn’t there to be taught by the apostles. I had a brief two-week time with Peter. That’s not enough time to get a whole systematic theology. I didn’t spend time with any other apostles, because they weren’t around. The disciples wouldn’t even accept me at first. I did spend my time preaching, and I was preaching so much, so constantly, and with such effect, that they ran me out of town. I am not a product of any human teacher; my gospel came from heaven.”

And he gives a little sort of common Jewish vow in verse 20: “Now in what I’m writing to you, I assure you before God I am not lying.” It’s always hard when you have to say that, isn’t it, because somebody’s accusing you of lying. “I’m not lying; I’m telling you the truth. After I left Jerusalem I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.”

And then in verse 22 he says, “I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. I was in Jerusalem for a brief time; but outside of Jerusalem in all the other places in Judea where there might be churches, no one even knew me. No one had ever seen me. I didn’t go anywhere else.” He’s giving every possible, possible biographical argument against the notion that

he had learned this from some other source than the mouth of the Lord.

“They didn’t even know me in the churches of Judea. All they knew,” – verse 23 – “they kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ That’s all then knew. And” – verse 24 – “they were glorifying God because of me. They didn’t know me, they hadn’t met me, but they heard the story about me. And because I was preaching the very message I once persecuted, they were glorifying God.”

Nothing in Paul’s biography has room for him to be taught by men. He went back to Syria and Cilicia – mark this. The churches in Judea didn’t know him. Brief visits with the people in Jerusalem. He went back. And you know how long he stayed there and preached? Look at chapter 2, verse 1: “After an interval of fourteen years I went to Jerusalem with Barnabas.”

What is he doing fourteen years? He’s still not connected to the leaders in Jerusalem. He’s still not getting his message from them. He preached in that part of the world. “Only after fourteen years did I go back.” Paul speaks for God; that’s the message, folks. He speaks for God. He got his message directly from God when he preached it and when he wrote it down.

Now back to verse 11. This is what he claimed, and this I want you to hear again. “I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Do we now understand that? Peter knew that. Peter knew that.

In 2 Peter, a most remarkable statement is made by Peter in chapter 3, verse 15 and 16. Listen, I’ll read it to you. He refers to, “Our beloved brother Paul.” He says, “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you. He wrote epistles. He wrote in all his letters, speaking in them of these things,” – these things related to the purposes of God in redemptive history – “he spoke of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and the unstable distort, as they do also” – listen to this – “the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

What did Peter just say? That what Paul wrote is – what? – Scripture. It belongs alongside the rest of the Scripture. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Holy men spoke for God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

You can accept the gospel because it came from heaven, and its most extensive explanation has been written in the thirteen letters of the apostle Paul. It is the true gospel not received from men, received from heaven. Any alteration of that gospel in any way brings about a curse on the one who propagates it. Those are apostolic credentials.

Lord, again it’s so refreshing for us to come to Your Word. It’s radiant, truthful glory shines on every page. It is a kind of supernatural experience to understand the Bible. We feel like we are having an encounter with heaven; and truly we are. We feel like we have been literally sitting in a class taught by the Holy Spirit. We feel like we’ve been caught up into heaven. The wonders of Scripture, the glory of Scripture is the radiating of Your own glory. You are the God of truth; Scripture is the revelation of that truth.

We thank You that we can trust the gospel. O how we thank You. How horrible to be in a religion that teaches lies; sends people to hell, thinking they're going to heaven. How horrible to be a part of deception. But that is what Satan does, he disguises himself as an angel of light, and his ministers are angels of light. But he's the father of lies and deceit, and a murderer from the beginning. He wants to kill and destroy. The only hope we have to escape death and judgment and hell is the true gospel, and receiving it as a gift of grace by faith alone.

Help us to embrace that gospel fully with all our hearts. Receive the gift of salvation, the forgiveness of sin, eternal life in Christ, and then proclaim it. You pronounce a curse on any other gospel. This is so precious. It cannot be altered in any way. But that is what Satan has done all over the world. Give us opportunity, Lord, first of all, to believe with all our hearts the true gospel, and then with all our strength to proclaim it. What a glorious calling.

You chose the apostle Paul. You called him to Yourself. You commissioned him to bring the light of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. And we have that same biography: chosen, called, commissioned to take the gospel to the world. May it spread to Your glory we pray. Amen.

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